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SUBJECT: FIRST STATE OF BABIL CONFERENCE: AMIDST THE GRIPES, A PLEDGE OF IMPROVED COOPERATION

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Babil cable.

¶2. (U) SUMMARY: On April 10, Governor Salam Salah Mahdi al-Muslimawi and Provincial Council Chairman Muhammad Ali Hussain Al-Massudi held a conference with District and Sub-District leaders on the "State of Babil." Although much of the discussion (at the Governor's urging) was a gripe session about PRT projects, this first of its kind conference was a first step forward in developing a province-wide dialogue. The PCC agreed to improve strategic planning with districts; to move ahead on projects in North Babil, where security has ostensibly been an impediment; and to hold another conference in the future for further discussion of concerns. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (U) While styled a "State of Babil" address, Governor Salam Salah Mahdi al-Muslimawi's April 10 gathering of local and district government leaders was more of a town hall meeting. PRT, ePRT, and coalition force representatives attended the session and saluted the Governor's initiative, while urging that the focus be on better implementation of the Province's budget. Provincial Council Chairman Muhammad ali Husayn al-Massudi (PCC) and PC member Abd al-Razzak al-Nasrawi actually had the most substantive exchanges with the participants. Attendees included the mayors of Iskandariyah, Shawmali, Hashimiyah, Mahawil, Jurf al-Saqr, and Madhatiyah; and the chairmen of the Hillah, Kifl, Qasim, and Musayyib (acting) Qadhas. Unfortunately, only one Director General (Ministry of Municipalities) was present. The governor's opening remarks were short and contained no specific program or policy announcements. He thanked the American delegation for attending and noted the importance of Babil province as the center of Iraq. He stressed his priority of maintaining security and attracting investment as key to all other reconstruction goals, especially those in tourism, agriculture and industry.

¶4. (U) The governor invited the local government representatives to address their concerns, specifically inviting them to "tell the Americans about your experiences." Many of the requests and complaints focused on the lack of coordination for US projects with provincial officials, as well as criticisms about contractor performance. The DG for Municipalities also jumped on the bandwagon, complaining that American, provincial and local officials all fail to coordinate municipal projects with him and his ministry.

¶5. (U) The governor and PCC concluded the meeting with remarks that acknowledged the need to improve strategic planning on projects in cooperation with the districts and sub-districts. Specifically, Jurf al-Saqr (N. Babil) got a commitment from the governor for more attention and more projects now that the security situation in the north was improving. The Governor and PCC agreed to take the concerns expressed at the meeting, study them and discuss them. The governor noted that he and other provincial leaders learn from mistakes and agreed to hold another meeting with local officials, which he promised would be more productive.

¶6. (SBU) Following a break, the Governor directed Mayors and Council Chairs to review security during the previous three weeks and report back to him. He asked participants to work with their IP chiefs to improve communication, though interestingly the IP was not in attendance.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: Outside of Hillah (the capitol) and Kifl (his hometown), the Governor pays infrequent visits to other municipalities despite numerous invitations and our urging. The PRT and 3ID have promoted the idea for this conference with the Governor. Although it did not adequately focus on how the province and Qadhas can better work together, it was a first step. The Governor has shown a willingness to continue the process, leaving room for improvement in strengthening Provincial-District cooperation - a linkage that has been rather weak in Babil but may strengthen with the passage of the new Provincial Powers Act.

HILLAS